

# American Black Bears in California State Parks



Photo:  
Janice Clark

State Parks and Campgrounds in the Sierra District are situated in areas that are also black bear habitat.

Thanks to the following agencies for their assistance:

El Dorado County  
U.S. Forest Service,  
Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit  
California Department of Fish and Game  
U.S Fish and Wildlife Service  
Tahoe Council for Wild Bears  
Yosemite National Park  
Sequoia National Park

## California State Parks, Sierra District:

Mono Lake State Tufa Natural Reserve  
Bodie SHP  
Grover Hot Springs SP  
Lake Valley SRA  
Washoe Meadows SP  
Emerald Bay SP  
DL Bliss SP  
Ed Z'berg Sugar Pine Point SP  
Ward Creek Unit  
Tahoe SRA  
Burton Creek SP  
Kings Beach SRA  
Donner Memorial SP  
Plumas Eureka SP  
Malakoff Diggins SHP  
Empire Mine SHP  
South Yuba River SP



For more information contact:  
Park Office, Campground Entry Station or

California State Parks  
Sierra District Headquarters  
7360 West Lake Blvd. (Highway 89)  
Tahoma, CA 96142  
(530) 525-7232

## Black bears (*Ursus americanus*)

are an important component of California's ecosystems and a valuable natural legacy for the people of California. The black bear is the only species of bear remaining in California and Nevada. The common name of black bear is misleading; California black bears may be black, brown, cinnamon, even blonde; sometimes with a white patch on the chest.

## BEAR ENCOUNTERS - Never approach a bear!

**In the campground:** Do not run. Be aggressive; assert your dominance by standing tall and making noise to scare the bear away. Banging pots and pans together and shouting loudly may work.

**In the woods:** This is the bear's territory; respect that and do not run. Make eye contact, but don't stare. Pick up small children. Make yourself appear as large as possible. Stay calm and quiet, back away slowly. Black bears will usually avoid confrontation with humans. Bears will often climb a tree if frightened and usually won't come down as long as humans or dogs are present.

### Get out of the way!

If the bear attempts to get away, do not block the bear's escape route.

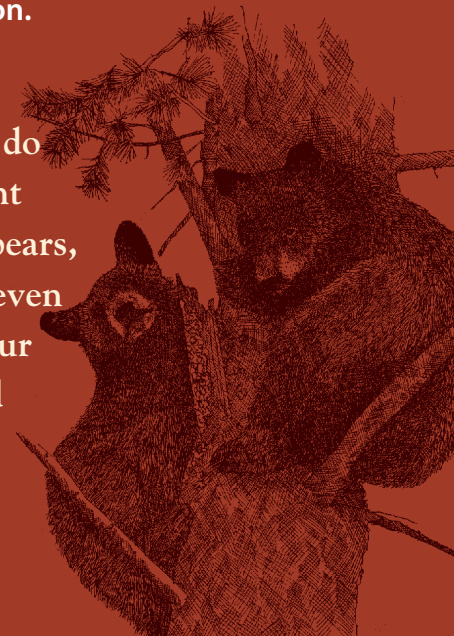
**Report all bear encounters:** in State Park campgrounds and picnic grounds to the park office, entrance station, campground hosts or to rangers on patrol.

Photo:  
Bryan Harry

Strict regulations are in place to reduce conflicts between humans and bears. There is *zero tolerance* for non-compliance.

- Bear-resistant food storage facilities are available at Sierra District Campgrounds.
- All food and refuse must be stored in the bear-resistant facilities provided unless it is being actively used or transported.
- No food or refuse may be stored in a vehicle in the campground.
- Food that cannot be stored in the bear-resistant facilities provided must be discarded.
- Non-compliance will result in park staff confiscating food and/or issuing a citation.

What you know and do can prevent injury to bears, property, even to you, your family and friends!





# Black Bears

**Adults** typically weigh 100 to 400 pounds and measure between 4 and 6 feet from tip of nose to tail. Males are larger than females. Some adult males may weigh over 500 pounds.

Black bears have curved claws that allow them to climb trees. They often climb to retreat from threats, including humans. A healthy bear may run up to 30 miles per hour for short distances. Black bears are excellent swimmers and are capable of crossing up to 1 ½ miles of open fresh water for food.

**Diet** Bears are omnivorous; their teeth are designed for crushing food rather than cutting like meat-eating carnivores. Bears' diets are based

on seasonal availability of food. Black bears' diets consist of six food categories: grasses, berries, nuts, insects, small mammals, wood fiber, and carrion (decaying flesh).

Food shortages occur in summer and fall when wild food is no longer available. Then, bears get bolder and travel farther searching for food. Human encounters with bears may be more frequent during these times.

The trunk of your car and coolers are not bear-proof! Bears may learn to associate wrappers and containers with food and can identify them by sight. They also learn to open some kinds of vehicle doors.

**Behavior** Black bears can be active anytime during the day or night. As winter approaches, bears will forage for food up to 20 hours a day to store enough fat to sustain them through hibernation.

Black bears may scavenge in garbage cans and dumpsters, and break into and demolish the interiors of houses, garages, cars and campers. Bears will also raid campsites and food caches and sometimes injure people. Often these incidents are the result of careless human behavior. Black bears will seek to avoid confrontation with humans. If encountered, always leave them an escape route.



Photo:  
Tammy Evans



Photo:  
Janice Clark



Photo:  
Scott Elliott

# Never Feed a Bear!

People should never feed bears, even unintentionally. Once bears get food from people, they begin to associate all humans with food. Without a natural fear of people, bears become increasingly aggressive.

- Black bears have a very keen sense of smell and are attracted to any food or refuse they can smell. In California a black bear was tracked as it traveled three miles upwind, in a straight line, to a food source.
- Store food, toiletries and/or anything with a scent properly in the bear-proof lockers provided.
- Keep sleeping bags, tents and sleeping areas free of food and beverage odors.
- Clean everything after preparing a meal.
- Dispose of garbage properly. If a bear-proof dumpster is not available, store your garbage in bear-proof lockers provided at campgrounds, until it can be disposed of properly.



## A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear!

Once habituated to sources of human food, bears will seek them out, creating conflicts with humans. The bear's behavior will not stop voluntarily. Unless the behavior can be corrected, bears may have to be killed. To avoid these deaths, the food source must be removed.